Ingersoll Lectures on Immortality

IMMORTALITY AND THE NEW THEODICY. By George A. Gordon. 1896.

HUMAN IMMORTALITY. Two supposed Objections to the Doctrine. By William James. 1897.

DIONYSOS AND IMMORTALITY: The Greek Faith in Immortality as affected by the rise of Individualism. By Benjamin Ide Wheeler. 1898.

THE CONCEPTION OF IMMORTALITY. By Josiah Royce. 1899.

LIFE EVERLASTING. By John Fiske. 1900.

SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY. By William Osler. 1904.

THE ENDLESS LIFE. By Samuel M. Crothers. 1905.

INDIVIDUALITY AND IMMORTALITY. By Wilhelm Ostwald. 1906.

THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY. By Charles F. Dole. 1907.

BUDDHISM AND IMMORTALITY. By William S. Bigelow. 1908.

IS IMMORTALITY DESIRABLE? By G. Lowes Dickinson. 1909.

EGYPTIAN CONCEPTIONS OF IMMORTALITY. By George A. Reisner. 1911.

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY IN THE SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE. By George H. Palmer. 1912.

METEMPSYCHOSIS. By George Foot Moore. 1914.

PAGAN IDEAS OF IMMORTALITY DURING THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE. By Clifford Herschel Moore. 1918.

LIVING AGAIN. By Charles Reynolds Brown. 1920.

IMMORTALITY AND THEISM. By William Wallace Fenn. 1921.

IMMORTALITY AND THE MODERN MIND. By Kirsopp Lake. 1922.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ETERNAL LIFE. By George E. Horr. 1923.

THE SENSE OF IMMORTALITY

LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Ingersoll Lecture, 1924

THE SENSE OF IMMORTALITY

BY

PHILIP CABOT

No longer property of the
Dayton & Montgomery Co. Public Library

CAMBRIDGE
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1924 LIBRARY OF
United Theological Seminary
BT
423
.C236
1924
40,709

COPYRIGHT, 1924
BY HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Second Printing

PRINTED AT THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, MASS., U. S. A.

This lecture was delivered on the lectureship founded at Harvard University by Caroline Haskell Ingersoll, in memory of her father George Goldthwait Ingersoll of the Class of 1815.

175200+
Mac

The Sense of Immortality

The Freedom of the Slave of God

To stand in this consecrated place, before such a distinguished but critical audience, and to attempt to instruct you about that aspect of the life of man at once the most debated, the most obscure, and the most vital that I can conceive, is to embark upon an enterprise as hopeless as the quest of the Holy Grail. Of course, I am doomed to fail. But that is the fate of man in most of his enterprises, and after all, perhaps it is the effort and not the result that St. Peter will record.

Two other considerations have helped me to face the ordeal. The first is the growing conviction that I am not in a worse predicament than my predecessors. Men are reluctant to admit the

authority of the expert in this business, and they rightly feel that the only contribution which any man can now make must come out of his own experience. The scholar may well be handicapped by the very wealth of his learning, for the avalanche of volumes which I brought down upon my head, when I sought to enlighten my ignorance, was massive enough to crush the originality out of genius.

And then there came to me the thought of the great figures who have stood here before, and the inspiration of their spirits guided me to a conviction which has given me courage.

The fear of the Lord is not always the gate of Wisdom, but he who enters is freed from other fears, for it is the entrance to faith; and I stand here this day sustained by that fear and by that faith.

We are passing through a time when there is so much testifying to the unfaith-

fulness of men in high places, that it can hardly fail to shake our faith in other men. But though men may be unfaithful, it is not so of God. *God is faithful;* to me that has been proved, and therefore, I, though the humblest of His servants, have come to know that there is one thing—and one thing only—in which I must not fail, and that is to strike at least one blow before I die for the faith that has made me. By that faith, and that faith alone, I have come to see the purpose of human life; and please God, I will not quit this world until I have testified to the fact. I feel that I am standing before you to-night as a witness summoned to testify to the faithfulness of God, a conviction which leads inevitably, I think, to the *sense of immortality.*

"Immortality" is the subject of this lecture, but I cannot believe that those who established it were unmindful of the fact that immortality cannot be

considered apart from faith in God. As Emerson says, "The moment the doctrine of immortality is separately taught, man has already fallen."[1] Indeed, he might have gone farther and said that immortality *cannot be separately* taught, or even conceived. For such, I think, is the truth. You may divide the waters of the universe, but they close behind your hand. I find no passage in the New Testament in which Jesus separates immortality from God. He proclaimed that all men were sons of God, and therefore immortal. That the conceptions are inseparable is the very heart of his teaching; if you reject it, you must reject the whole. Cut the branch from the stem and it dies. Cut off immortality from the God-head and it is dead, also.

But even if it were possible, I could not attempt the task for I should be entangled at once in a maze of definition

[1] "The Over Soul": Essays, First Series, page 266.

and argument in which I should be lost. My fear of definitions may be merely a cowardly prudence; for I confess that, when I am forced to handle them, I feel like an amateur snake-charmer exhibiting cobras. I fear their bite. But I am conscious of a better excuse, for even in skilful hands definitions may kill the subject they define. A dead faith is not of much service to you, and, therefore, it is clear to me that he who would defend his faith in immortality must avoid killing it at the outset by chopping off its head.

It is my firm belief that this life and the next are all of a piece. I see nothing in the law of God, as it works in this world, which warrants the assumption that death will make a clean breach with life. The future life will start where this one stops or nowhere; the man who serves God to-day will not be out of a job to-morrow; nor perhaps he who serves the Devil either.

I speak to you of faith in God as I have found it by experience; and one of the most remarkable points in that experience is that I have been able to verify in my own case the fact so often illustrated in the Bible, that faith begins in the heart and not in the head; in other words, men develop feelings into ideas and not ideas into feelings. Certainly in my case faith began in the region of the emotions as a non-rational thing, and proceeded thence to my head to get itself rationalized. The effort to graft faith on to the stem of logic failed, for the sap would not run. But when I reversed the process and grafted reason on faith, the result was better.

Reason and logic are the keys to the doors of knowledge, but not of wisdom; in my case they would not open the door to faith. It must be opened from within, and there seems to be a time-lock on it set by the hand of God. You cannot

crack Heaven like a bank vault; the jimmy of the psychic has failed to spring the door; and I, therefore, frankly abandon all attempts to prove a thesis. This is not the plaintiff's brief but his confession of faith. No blow with a knockdown argument is aimed at the head of any man. It is his heart that I aim for; the region of emotion and instinct where the spring of action lies hidden.

I am profoundly impressed with the power of faith (or instinct based upon feeling more than on reason) to influence men's action, not only in the field of religion, but in the affairs of this world as well. For I observe that it has great power with the men wisest in worldly matters. Your successful salesman, for example, owes his success to the faith of his customers in *him* rather than in his arguments or his statistics. In business, construction, or finance those with imagination directed by instinct—feeling—

faith—achieve success, while men who in learning and intellect tower above them quite often fail. Logic applied to many problems of the merchant fails to solve them, for logical reasoning is often faced with a mass of evidence which will break the grip of the most powerful mind, leaving the man doubtful and unable to act. The great merchant achieves by instinct a sort of rhythmic tuning to the movement of the markets, which is the secret of his power. The sureness of his foresight is quite marvellous, arising apparently from a synthetic harmony of the whole creature in which not the brain or reasoning faculty alone, but the whole structure of the man, works together in leading him to his decision. All acts of extraordinary rightness or heroism seem to have behind them an ultra-rational sanction to which men bow.

As a concrete example of the power of

instinctive men, take the British merchant marine. The officers of her ships, who give the institution its heroic character, are not men of rare intelligence or great learning. They are men of sense and method, but also of instinct and of faith. They do not reason about their duty; they *know it;* the act comes straight from the shoulder, like a blow. It is so of all great leaders both on land and sea.

But here I must try to steer you clear of a confusion into which I myself fell. I want to plead for courageous faith and not blind fanaticism. The men I speak of do not act on *faith* when they can have *fact.* There *is* a world of *fact* where it is folly to go by guess-work. The ship captain does not guess at his reckoning, he "takes the sun"; the engineer does not *guess* at the strength of a girder, he works it out; the banker does not guess at the market value of his security, he looks it up.

Never guess when you can know, but when you cannot, have the courage to follow your instinct and leap.

These considerations give me confidence in my instinctive faith. There is a veil drawn between us and our highest aspiration—which is to see the face of God. We must leap through it with faith, just as men in the work-a-day world leap to their highest material achievements.

And if this be the sound method, when I desire to arouse an active faith in another man, I must follow the example of the prize fighter who aims his most telling blow at what he calls the solar plexus, alleged to be located behind the stomach. While the doctors tell me there is no such organ, I feel as if there were. Compelling conviction *feels* like a radiation from the middle of a man, flooding him with heat which makes him act; such action is in part instinctive, and I

find that men of the keenest and most reliable judgment habitually act so. They know how to act, but not always why; while your strictly rational person (the pure thinking machine) is an unsafe business guide.

I conclude, therefore, that to move a man to action you must hit for his solar plexus (even though there is none), and further, that you should beware how you use as a weapon the argument that the act is safe. Probably you will not convince him; but if you do, you will deprive him of the zest which gives him his power. For he has learned by experience that he who seeks a profit must take a reasonable (though not a crazy) risk: you cannot get something for nothing. Man does not shun all risk, for he is impregnated with a sporting instinct. From his first beginnings he has lived surrounded by danger; those who have survived are those who have had the

skill and the intelligence to overcome it; the struggle has bred the joy of battle into their very bones, so that the element of risk is essential to their happiness.

It is only those who have been in mischief—the Devil's disciples—who fear *to die.* The servants of God, it seems, will risk their lives against a straw. As a child, I gulped down with the rest the familiar quotation from the Book of Job: "A skin for a skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life"; and it was only at a recent date that, finding it untrue to life, I examined it more closely, and discovered that the remark is attributed to Satan, the father of lies.

And so I repeat, good men will not run from danger, and he who would lead them into action must hit for the solar plexus with a sporting proposition. Oberman shows the right spirit when he throws down the gauntlet to the Al-

mighty exclaiming, "And if it be true that annihilation awaits us, let us so live that it shall be an unjust fate." Of all sporting propositions the greatest ever devised is the Christianity of Jesus, which for that very reason has proved "unto Jews a stumbling-block and unto Gentiles foolishness." It is the only faith that will put adequate power behind your blow.

For the assertion that the sporting instinct is inherent in Christianity you need not take my word, for the great Dr. L. P. Jacks has proved it up to the hilt.

The hunter is the oldest of craftsmen, his life depends upon his skill, and, therefore, the hunter for the souls of men may do well to follow the practice of other hunters and keep to leeward of his quarry. Certainly the smell of some noted evangelists was an offence to the nostrils of many they sought to save.

But this is not a still hunt. It is the counsel of the hunters, so that I do wisely to indicate to you my angle of approach; and in order that we may all act in harmony, it is necessary that I should give you some description of the groupings or sub-divisions of those whose souls I search for. I find three main divisions: first, those who believe in God the Father Immortal, and in His immortal children; second, those who believe in God and in the law of obedience to His will (that is, in conscience), but are doubtful of their immortality; and third, those who know that they have a conscience because it occasionally hurts them, but who do not know God. Proceeding to consider them separately, I begin with the assertion, which you may think over-bold, that although many in the first, and all in the second group appear to be uninterested in discussions of immortality, it is not because they dis-

believe it, but because they believe it so firmly. Nothing bores a man like telling him what he knew before.

Taking those in the first group, who consciously believe in immortality, and asking myself what it is that they know and what it is that they want to know in regard to it, I find that they believe implicitly in the great fact of immortality, but do not want exact information as to details. Such certainty would be not only useless but fatal to their happiness. In a world the uncertainties of which almost drive us mad, that may sound like a foolish statement; for we know that the stockbroker would barter his very soul for a sure tip on to-morrow's market, or the cotton-spinner on the price of July cotton. But it is essential to note that what these men demand is a tip given to them but withheld from others. To know with certainty what will happen to-morrow, if all other men

knew it also, would be not only worthless but ruinous. It would be intolerable if man could foresee all the events of his life, and of the lives of others. Free will would be destroyed; the road would stretch away straight and dusty to the grave; and if this knowledge were enlarged, so that man could know not only what would happen in this world, but what would happen for all eternity (if, in short, he were given absolute certainty about the exact nature of immortality), such knowledge would be a nightmare fit to drive him into screaming madness. I repeat, therefore, that the fact of immortality is central to the faith of those in my first group, but nothing more.

Of those in my second group, this is not true. Some of the noblest men and women whom I have known tell me that they doubt the immortality of the soul, and do not care much about it anyway.

Their attitude is well described by Emerson's remark that with the question "of immortality the soul when well employed is incurious."[1] "The soul when well employed," mark that well, for otherwise you will fall, as I did some thirty years ago, into the pit you have digged.

The men and women of this group who doubt immortality are *always* well employed. Among them you find the scientist striving to enlarge the sum of human knowledge; the doctor laboring to save the lives of men; the social worker sacrificing his body to save the soul of another; the great industrialist and the banker battering down obstructions in the material world. These men work from a high sense of *duty to the race*, and find all the immortality they crave in the belief that good works survive; their motive is obedience, well described by Lowell, —

[1] vol. vi, p. 227.—Riverside Edition.

Three roots bear up Dominion: Knowledge,
Will, —
These twain are strong, but stronger yet the
third, —
Obedience — 't is the great tap-root that still,
Knit round the rock of Duty, is not stirred,
Though Heaven-loosed tempests spend their
utmost skill.

Duty—conscience—obedience to the law of God, these are their motives. If I ask them how they come by the power which produces their splendid work, when they believe that all consciousness will soon vanish utterly, they answer: "We work to benefit the race, for the generations to come; that is our immortality. There is a moral law which we obey and which so commands us." This humble little sense of duty! There is something supernatural and uncanny in the power of it which can drive the astronomer faster than the speed of light, make the physicist more agile than the molecule, and enable the engineer to

catch Nature by the hair and harness her to his car. If it be not divine, it is at least superhuman. These men and women have faith in God and the instinct of obedience to His laws. Does their faith differ essentially from mine? No one can see these people at work and doubt that they *are* immortal—no one, that is, except themselves. But I find it baffling that these immortals should doubt their immortality. They are too modest and too well employed to care. "If annihilation awaits us, at least we *will* so live that it shall be undeserved." Is it a mere question of terms? Is what I call immortality, and they call conscience, one and the same? Such an idea may seem to you preposterous, but I have come to believe it true. My worship of God and belief that I am His son produce in me obedience; the sceptical scientist's sense of duty also produces obedience; "By their fruits ye shall

know them"; man's faith is proved by what he does and not by his definition of it.

I am not a rational animal, but I believe in a rational world; and unless it be mere bedlam, the same effect must always follow the same cause; and so, when I see a violent atheist risk his life to save a dog, while the deacon climbs for the cyclone cellar, I would barter the whole holy family of the deacon for the God of the atheist, and claim a bargain to boot. Of the two, the atheist has the stronger faith. He may deny God and immortality, but his worship of No-God has tuned him in harmony with the universal law which I call the law of God. Your good atheist's atheism is in his head-piece, where it does no harm. His heart is right. "The wicked sayeth *in his heart* there is no God"; but not this man.

Those in the first group believe themselves to be sons of God and immortal

because their God is immortal; those in the second group believe in God and recognize the command of conscience, which, as I see it, is the instinct to harmonize the act of the individual with the law of God. Such an instinct can arise only from the fact that man's soul is essentially akin to God (that is, a part of God, or, as I call it, a son of God), so that I have come to believe that this thing called "sense of duty to others and solicitude for the welfare of future generations," which animates those in my second group, is the same instinct which I call immortality; and I hope that I shall not offend them by suggesting that they seem to me to have the *sense of immortality* without an intellectual belief in it. That is enough for me, and I note in passing that this sense gives to their lives the harmony which I observed in the successful merchant. This is how he came by it. If a theologian should ask

me whether man can have faith in immortality without knowing it, I reply by reminding him that in all such men I postulate explicit faith in God. Given this, I think the sense of immortality is often most useful when subconscious. For faith is a *spiritual condition* and not *a creed* or a form of words; it needs no copyright to legalize and protect it.

There are some, however, who would claim membership in the second group because they recognize a sense of duty, whom I must exclude. These are the selfish men, who talk about their duty to others but think about themselves, and those pitiable persons who suffer from the disease sometimes called the New England conscience, although it has no geographical limit. I exclude them because the instinct of duty, in order to be a safe guide, must be founded upon a *belief in God* sufficiently controlling to convert the man. Without that it will

not produce the harmony essential to a useful life; conversion is necessary to that harmony.

At the risk of seeming to labor the point, I want to suggest two states of mind which are not uncommon, and which are often called faith, but mistakenly, as I think, because they do *not* convert the man. One is the profession of belief in God by those who think it a good gambling chance; they are really worshippers of Mammon, who would like to stand well with both sides. If I read his letters aright, the Hon. Cecil Rhodes was one of these.

And then there are those whose faith in God is what I call a creed: a man-made thing of high importance, but not one to be blindly worshipped. For it is a faith in men rather than a faith in God; surrender of the mind and will to a creed does not produce conversion which frees the worshipper from fear.

Let me suggest to you this analogy. The soul of man is like a fountain in the Garden of Eden, supplied with the living water which is the will of God, and pouring it out over the garden of life as service to mankind. In the healthy soul both inlet and overflow are always open; what God supplies to the man he passes on to the world, and the happiest man, like the clearest spring, is he who overflows most abundantly. Such is the soul referred to by Emerson, and such is its good employment. But sin will stop the inlet; selfishness in refusing to pass on God's gift will cut off the supply, and the water in the basin will stagnate and go rotten. Or a man may block the inlet by losing his faith in God and go on giving out by blind instinct until the basin be drained to the dregs. Such is the man with the "ingrowing" conscience, the acid lees of an ancient sense of duty which, drained of faith, has turned from

an inspiration into an insanity and eaten out the soul of the sufferer. All men who believe in God and strive to live in harmony with His will are fountains of living water, whether they have arrived at the knowledge of God through the craving for immortality, or whether they have found God as "The Whole," of which the instinct of duty in them is a conscious and obedient part. These last have faith in God; they are obedient to His will and they leave the future in His hands. That is the pinnacle of faith, beyond which no man can climb; and this is why I feel that the members of my second group are perhaps the best men and women in our contemporary world. Those who practise this way of life are true sons of God; as such, they are immortal if God is immortal; and so, I say again, the faith of these men and women and my faith in immortality are part and parcel of the same thing.

I can find no vital distinction between these two groups of men; the difference is superficial and may perhaps arise from the road which they have travelled to reach their faith. Like men coming upon a shield from opposite directions, they describe it differently because they see opposite sides. Those in whose faith the concept of immortality is central may be those in whom an intense life-force has bred a craving for survival, which they were powerless to appease until they had found an Immortal Father; while those in whom the sense of moral obligation is central have come to know God through finding themselves unable to unify and harmonize their lives without conscious submission to His will.

I maintain that there are at least two roads that lead to God, in spite of the assertion of Baron von Hügel that all religious souls come first to God and then to immortality. For I find a Spanish

scholar, also a good Catholic, who asserts the exact opposite. Both are sturdy champions. A man might back either and find himself a winner; but I think they will run a dead heat, for the truth, as I see it, is that faith in God comes in answer to a hunger for Him which is sometimes the result of the life-force seeking survival, and sometimes of the craving for guidance in the path of duty.

This only is essential. All who have faith in God have surrendered their will to His. By so doing they have been born again of the spirit and will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. All are in fact twice-born men, and before I close I shall take up this point again.

If I have been able to carry you with me so far, you will readily agree that the evangelist will only waste his breath in urging upon them the doctrine of immortality as an isolated dogma. To him they will not listen, but only to those who

preach the *power of faith.* The instinct and the lives of these men and women confirm the fact which I have tried throughout to emphasize, namely, that the *sense* of immortality comes with faith in God and is inseparable from it. You have both or neither.

I come now to the third group — those who have a conscience but no faith in God. Many of them have an intellectual belief in the idea of God; but it is an idea—a dead thing—and not a living faith. God will not accept half-hearted faith. You must offer Him complete surrender and conversion.

For those in this group I speak "as one having authority," for I was a charter member of it and for many years an active one, and, therefore, the most useful thing for me to do is to report the manner of my escape. I had no living faith. Men have accused me of having a New England conscience, but I think

they flattered me. A blind life-force was my real motive. In so far as education and early environment can promote spiritual health, I was singularly favored; nothing could have been finer than the atmosphere of refinement, scholarship, and social service with which I was surrounded. I heard little discussion of dogmatic theology: faith in God was implicit rather than spoken; but my whole early life was illuminated by the rarest spirit of service and sense of duty in the whole family circle. Before I went to college Phillips Brooks had reached his prime; I heard him often and with interest, but as the event proved, without lasting effect, as is too often true of preaching unsupported by personal contact. Through the years of adolescence and early manhood my soul was submerged by the body and the material world, as if the body had rolled over, so to speak, upon the soul and crushed it.

I was little more than a healthy animal, driven by the life-force, loving activity and adventure, and almost unconscious of the existence of a soul. The instinct of adventure, which was strong, brought me into contact with the hunters of the north, who, in conjunction with the forces of nature, were my best teachers; and I recall the significant fact that I had an active and romantic imagination which I now believe might have been turned into more useful channels by a skilful "engineer of souls."

Going into business immediately after college, I had found a footing at thirty and was a fair success, as measured by earning capacity. The life-force which had been strong enough to overlay the spirit drove me at a pressure too high to be healthy; but life was exciting and I must have been over thirty-five before serious misgivings assailed me. About that time the excitement began to pall;

success did not beget happiness, and there was little joy in life. I had not achieved harmony with my world. I was disturbed by the suspicion that I was not making an adequate return to society for what it paid me, and I now see that the eternal law of compensation described by the prophetic Emerson was at work. My efforts to "slice off the upper surface of life so thin as to leave it bottomless" had failed, and the Law of this world was demanding payment.

It is the law that in the material world every gain is balanced by an equal loss, but not in the spiritual world. "The soul is not a compensation but a life. There is no penalty to virtue; no penalty to wisdom." Hence man moves upward. There is here an increment of pure profit without loss.

But the meat and drink on which I had fed my soul were not the bread of life and the living water; I was anhun-

gered and athirst, although barely conscious of it. At forty-two I was attacked by a dangerous disease, which gradually reduced my physical power, until after eight years the weakened body seemed to release the soul. Would that I had sooner learned the beneficent power of fasting and prayer! When first faced with the prospect of death and lacking the solace of prayer, I knew the meaning of fear. An *unhealthy* soul had been *ill employed*, and being unprepared to leap into the unknown, I feared it. For many years a subconscious instinct unlighted by faith had been my only guide, but there came a day when it *broke through into consciousness*. Conviction of my own weakness, craving for help and willingness to obey fused into a desire so dominating that it warranted an answer. Groping unskilfully in the spiritual world, I found at last relief in prayer: the expression of my yearning for im-

mortality and for communion with God. My prayer was answered and I was born again, almost exactly at the age of fifty.

The released spirit found a faith that it was a part of God; that if God was immortal, it was immortal too. This brought me new life and for the first time peace. Perhaps my experience is not altogether normal, but it may be that the steps in the process will be the same for other men, and that, if I can analyze what happened in my case and find the underlying principle which would have helped me, it may serve some other man. But such an undertaking is valueless unless Jesus spoke literal truth when he said, "Ye must be born again if ye would enter the Kingdom of Heaven." I believe he did. Conversion is necessary to salvation. Conversion saved me from the jangling discord of a will torn between body and soul, polarized my life,

and taught me where to look for guidance.

The points which now seem to me significant in the process are: that owing to the reaction against dogmatic theology, which was strong at that time, the systematic practice of worship formed no part of my early education; that at college I received no religious training or inspiration; that the greatest preaching of the period did not produce any permanent effect; that my native tendency to individualism, materialism, and intellectual scepticism was emphasized instead of being counteracted by my college course; and that I was given too early a freedom which I was incompetent to use. As a result of native weakness and the lack of a religious motive, my life has been largely wasted. But the essential fact for me to-day is *that I was born again*, and I have faith to believe that all men are capable of conversion. If this is not

true, the house of my faith is built upon the sands.

Conversion is the acid test by which faith is proved. If a man's faith be a true faith, it will appear in his life; it will convert him and synchronize his acts with the laws of the universe, so that he will display poise and power. This is no question of creeds, or philosophical principles. It is *not* a fabric of words, but of acts. A man may deny immortality or even God, but if his way of life shows that he has subordinated his will to the laws of God, he is a twice-born man and Son of God.

I cannot believe that conversion is a rare, miraculous, or revolutionary process. Such eminent authorities as Harold Begbie and William James refer to it as a spiritual revolution, and cite many examples of conversions of the explosive type in men of middle age which tore the man like an earthquake. It is quite clear

that the crust on them was hard. But unless by the word revolution you mean simply a turning around, it does not, I think, accurately describe what takes place in most cases. For conversion is an evolution and not a revolution or catastrophe, even in the most explosive cases. In these it is the result of a gradual change of valuation of the spiritual and material goods of a man, as a result of which he finally admits bankruptcy and throws himself on the mercy of his creditor—God. Like the failure of a great merchant, it may come with a crash, but it was long in preparation. Many of you can remember the "Baring panic" produced by the failure of one of the oldest and greatest banking houses in the world. One day all was serene: the next morning, when you looked at your newspaper, the financial world was in ruins. The event was sudden, but it was no accident. It was the result of unsound

methods of business which had been going on for years. Conversion is like that. The merchant throws himself on the mercy of his creditors and often gets small mercy. But the spiritual bankrupt or convert, throwing himself on the mercy of God, always obtains mercy — but on one condition: his repentance must be sincere; he must make a clean breast of it. His schedule of assets and liabilities must be honest and complete. If it is, he will find God's mercy infinite. This is the story of all the sudden or explosive converts. They find that by surrender to God they have an infinite credit on which to draw.

As I have said, these sudden conversions are the result, I think, of a slow process of spiritual evolution. All men must be born again, but not all must go through bankruptcy. As in the case of the merchants, many foresee the progress of changing values and adapt them-

selves to it in time to avoid bankruptcy. But all men and all merchants must harmonize themselves with the law, or be annihilated.

Conversion is, I repeat, the result of a slowly born conviction which forces the man at last to throw up his hands, abandon anarchy, and fall into step with the rest of the Universe. It is a process closely akin to many of the evolutionary changes which occur in un-self-conscious animals and plants. Those that obey survive. That is Nature's law. Shall the soul of man alone be exempt? The command of the prophet, "Believe in God [that is, obey His law] or go to Hell," may seem harsh to you, but it is milder than the command of Nature, "Obey my law or be annihilated."

One might argue from the obvious unity of the universe that the disobedient man, like the disobedient plant, would be annihilated and that, therefore,

man in the exercise of free-will can choose between immortality and extinction. But I bid you remember the law of conservation of energy. The animal or plant, or the body of a man, if disobedient, may die; but energy and the soul are immortal. Doubtless his obedience to the will of God will affect man's future life as it does his present, and we may accept as true the teaching of Christ, "Not every one who saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."

If conversion is a process of evolution, it should normally occur in such a quiet and natural way as almost to escape notice, which is exactly what I find. Take, for example, the changes you observe between the wild young undergraduate and the same man a year or two later, in the schools of Law, Medicine, and Science, or in some men who marry

young. One can think of innumerable cases where changes occurred which marked, I believe, a second birth. The assertion is beyond my power to prove, but I cling stubbornly to the belief that intimate acquaintance would show that all happy, effective, oriented men have passed through the fire and been born again.

And, therefore, I make bold to assert that all men whose lives are dominated by faith in God have assimilated into their structure all that is essential in the doctrine of immortality, and that the forces engaged in the crusade for a revival of faith can all be massed against the enemy's left wing, so to speak, in which are brigaded those of feeble faith or of no self-conscious faith at all. But because in every one of them the spark of conscience is still alive, they can all be won over. There are none in whom it has gone out: the hand of man, moved by the

will of God, can fan it into a flame that will burn through the crust and break out of the subconscious.

If you look at the lives of the most degraded, — those who of their own free-will have sunk almost to the level of brutes, — you will see a marvellous thing; for no matter how a man has lived or how low he has sunk, there is always a level to which he will not fall; there is always some baseness to which he will not stoop; some act from which he will recoil with horror. He cannot live at so low a level as to destroy an instinct in him which has a restraining power. The spark of conscience is *always alive*, waiting to be fanned into flame.

I believe that conversion often begins with the breaking into consciousness of the sense of duty — conscience becoming self-conscious; but when I ask myself whether it is always safe for the zealous disciple to try to hasten the process in

his brother, I get the answer that it is not. Rare skill is needed, or damage will be done, and there is always danger. Self-consciousness of some kinds does great harm. It seems, for example, that the less we think about the operation of our bodies the better. Beware how you worry about going to sleep, or how you fool with that part of the nervous system by which your internal organs are controlled—that which directs the heart, lungs, and the miraculous internal chemistry known as metabolism, by which you turn bread into blood and bone. Make yourself conscious, and thereby anxious, about these processes, and they go balky at once and produce the hypochondriac or neurasthenic. Nothing is more certain, in this world of uncertainty, than that the man who bothers his head about these processes—that is, he who drags them by the tail from their holes in the subconscious—is unwise. They

resist such meddling fiercely, and when you get them out, they bite you. Here of a truth is a danger signal on the road to the subconscious which you had better not run past, for if you do, you wreck your train.

Clearly some processes should remain automatic, but I think not all. Exact information on the subject must come from the experts, but may not a plain man venture to report the guesses which his experience suggests? It may help him to understand the report of the experts when received. We are often self-conscious when we should be automatic, and *vice versa.* Is this the safe rule? Don't meddle with those processes which are older than intellect and memory, but cultivate the younger ones. For instance, the nervous system, which controls the bodily functions, is common to man and beast and must, therefore, be older than the intellect. Man could eat

long before he could think. The intellect is the child a thousand times removed of the nervous system, which therefore resents the baby's curiosity; as who should say, "I reached my full manhood a million years or so before you were born. Don't teach your grandmother how to suck eggs."

But some of the emotions, including the religious instinct, seem to be the children of mind and memory, and docile under their teaching. The sense of duty, for instance, can reach its full development only with their aid, for thus it grows into the love of God. Conversion, as I have said, is such a development or evolution. The intelligence must be used, but used with skill.

The method of some revivalists, so eager for results that they call emotional hysteria to their aid, has been justly condemned. In dragging the religious instinct out of limbo they bring with it

other passions which often fall upon the tender thing and devour it. Skill and caution must be the tools, and they must be guided by the hand of faith. The man who thinks to take conversion out of the hand of God into his own is a public menace, for conversion must begin within the sinner's soul; the seed planted by God's hand must sprout from an inner heat. As I have said before, it cannot be grafted from the stem of logic. The man's conscience must knock before the door is opened. Like the chicken in the egg, it must break the shell before old-hen intellect can pluck it out and teach it to live.

If there be a keeper of hens who has strayed so far from his habitat as to be within hearing, he will want to remind me that, in the process of hatching eggs, hens have now given place to incubators, and that my illustration is mouldy. I thank him for the thought, but I reply

that, though many machines have been invented for the purpose of hatching souls, none have succeeded. Man can help the chick to grow; he cannot hatch it.

But the new-born chick has not many feathers—food and shelter must be provided in order that the craving for God born in weakness may grow into love and knowledge of Him and conversion be permanent and complete. This is where religious education comes in. A full-grown faith can protect itself, for it has reached an elevation at which the germ diseases of childhood cannot live. But when it is young, the loving hand of man can be its doctor. It will be attacked by the germ of intellectual scepticism, and I bid you beware how you send the infant soul to spend a week-end with Science in the house of Logic. It may come home with a cold in its heart. Material reverses, disease, and the loss of friends will often blight the budding

spirit; apply the *stimulant* of consecrated personality, *the food* of historic faith and *the warmth* of common worship.

These are the remedies which have worked for me; and when hours of darkness come, I find deep comfort in reviewing the events in my own life, to many of which I can give no coherent meaning without belief in God.

The doctors of the soul who are licensed to administer these remedies are the ministers, and one thinks that there was never a time when these men had such an opportunity and such power. The profession of the ministry, ever a pursuit of honor, is to-day the most useful career upon which a man can embark. But all men armed with humility and faith may be laborers in this field, for to bring men into conscious harmony with the will of God is the heart and soul of *education*. All men may help by precept or by the example of their lives — for

the evidence of a man's life is the greatest of all educational forces. The mighty tree of faith springs from one of two roots—the craving for immortal life, or a controlling sense of duty; both are of adequate power, for both lead toward harmony with the will of God and unify an otherwise divided and futile life. Immortality and faith are one. Many have it; all can have it. Of the three groups with which I opened two have merged into one, and the third will lose a member with every man who is born again.

And now, to draw together the strands of my address and knot them, so to speak, I remind you of my formula: "Hit for the solar plexus with a sporting proposition"; or, in terms of religious teaching: take the religion of Christ as your weapon and strike for the hearts of men. Thus will the faith of those who *believe* be strengthened, and those whom

175200+

the hand of God has prepared for conversion will thus be protected and fed.

Many of you who hear my words are ministers consecrated to preach the word of God, and every man and woman in this place is bound, as with a first duty, to proclaim the faith that is in him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Ye are not your own but ye were bought with a price." That means you and me. We were bought with a price and we must pay it.

Every day is doom's day; we are as ever at the cross roads. To-day the sign boards read:

☞ To Faith. ☞ To Failure.

You must choose between them at peril of your soul, but the choice is simple.

We stand upon the threshold of a religious revival, like runners set upon the mark. The starter has raised his pistol and may discharge it before you

leave your seats. It is an opportunity and a duty such as no man now living ever saw, and I beseech you, when you set to your work of preaching the Gospel, preach the *Gospel according to Christ*, not according to Moses or Loyola, Luther, or Lake. Preach the simple faith of Christ, which will never leave you without an answer when men ask about the Immortality of the Soul.

1926
1931
1934
1938
1941

DATE DUE

237 C11

BT 923 .C236 1924

Cabot, Philip, 1872-1941.

The sense of immortality

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

United Theological Seminary Library
MAIN BT923.C236 1924
Cabot, Philip The sense of immortality /
3 0645 0002 5931 3